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ABSTRACT

This digest suggests steps to take to organize an outdoor education organization at a state, regional, or local level. After an individual or group has determined the need for an organization and an area to be served, the first step is to organize a working meeting of no more than 20 key persons. Next, the purpose of the organization and services to be provided by the organization must be determined. Services may include workshops, newsletters, resources, and/or certification programs. A list of immediate and long-term goals should be compiled and prioritized. Officers for the first year of operation need to be determined and selected. Essential committees must be identified and named. Significant committees during the early years of the organization might include membership, constitution and bylaws, finance, newsletter, workshop, resource services, goals, and nominating. Finally, the constitution and bylaws should be written, including names, purpose, logo, membership, dues, meeting schedules, makeup of the executive board, officers, committees, and their lengths of terms and responsibilities. Allied professional organizations that share common purposes with the new outdoor education organization can be contacted. The digest furnishes the names, addresses, and telephone numbers of 10 such organizations and 6 government agencies. (NEC)

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ERIC DIGEST

OUTDOOR EDUCATION

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Establishing An Outdoor Education Organization

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CLEARINGHOUSE ON RURAL EDUCATION and SMALL SCHOOLS

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OUTDOOR EDUCATION

ESTABLISHING AN OUTDOOR EDUCATION ORGANIZATION

"Outdoor educators" from all disciplines will benefit greatly by being part of an outdoor education organization at a local, regional, or state level. Such an organization enables individuals and groups with a common interest in outdoor education to share new information and techniques and to learn new skills. Individuals with more experience teaching outdoor programs are continually "renewed" as they share attitudes and information with less experienced educators. An outdoor education organization can provide hands-on activities through workshops and can share valuable information on available human resources and resource materials through its newsletter. Because outdoor education is multidisciplinary, there is definitely a need to have an organization that brings individuals and groups together in order to appreciate, understand, and promote the wise use of the total environment by all people.

Perhaps when more states have their own outdoor education organizations, a national network can be established. Meanwhile, the present challenge is to organize where there is interest and need—whether at the local, regional, or state level. The rationale for existence need not be the same for all states. Educators in a single city may organize in some instances, even if there is not a statewide organization. In other circumstances, regional or local groups may consolidate as a spin-off of a strong state organization. This digest suggests steps to take in order to organize at the state, regional, or local level.

What is the first step?

After an individual or group has determined the need for an organization and an area to be served, the first step requires initiating a meeting. Persons interested in outdoor education should be identified from a variety of areas such as public and private schools, colleges and universities, camps, and agencies as well as from allied professional organizations.

Letters should be mailed to no more than 20 key persons, stating the purpose, location, and time and date of the meeting. A convenient return form should be enclosed so that a response can be easily made regarding one's interest in such an organization and availability of attending the organizational meeting. A follow-up letter should be sent verifying the meeting place, date, and time and providing a detailed agenda. It should be made clear that the meeting is a "work" and not just a "talk" session. Participants should be requested to bring to the meeting ideas and information such as brochures of other organizations, newsletters, membership cards, constitutions and bylaws, and the like.

What are subsequent steps?

In order to establish an outdoor education organization, specific steps must be followed which represent an ongoing process from the very first meeting to a point when the organization achieves stability.

IDENTIFY THE PURPOSE of the organization. Purposes may be similar to those adopted by the New York Outdoor Education Association which state that the Association is dedicated to:

- Promoting outdoor education in New York State
- Encouraging quality education through outdoor experiences as a process for fulfilling educational goals
- Fostering the development of attitudes, values, and behavior that shows an understanding of man's interdependence with the natural world

DETERMINE THE SERVICES TO BE PROVIDED by the organization. The Texas Outdoor Education Association lists such services as:

Workshops to provide educators of all disciplines with first-hand teaching/learning experiences, using the outdoors as a classroom

Newsletters designed to inform members of activities, programs, and events related to outdoor education

Resource services for guidance to individuals, educational institutions, organizations, and agencies interested in using the outdoors as a learning laboratory

Certification programs for individuals who wish to become instructors in selected teaching areas

COMPILE A LIST OF IMMEDIATE AND LONG-TERM GOALS for the organization and prioritize it. Immediate activities may include printing and designing membership brochures, cards and stationery, creating a logo, hosting a conference each year, selling T-shirts, or publishing a newsletter. Long-term goals may include publishing a journal, hiring a full-time executive director, printing a membership directory, or publishing curriculum materials. Such a list involves in-depth brainstorming in order to differentiate between (1) tasks that should be accomplished for the immediate growth of the organization and those that should be attempted only after the membership increases, or when funding is obtained from support organizations; and (2) administrative tasks (e.g., cards, logos, etc.) and plans that meet the purpose of the organization (e.g., identifying outdoor educators, sponsoring workshops, etc.)

SELECT OFFICERS FOR THE FIRST YEAR of operation and meet at regular intervals to complete the preliminary concerns of the organization. This relatively small group of dedicated individuals serving as officers and committee members may be thought of as a steering committee for the first year of operation.

Determining officers who need to be elected to run the business of the organization is essential. For a state organization, the following titular criteria should be considered: President, President-Elect, Past President, Vice-President for Finance, Vice-President for Membership, Vice-President for Public Relations, and Recording Secretary. Several Members-at-Large may be designated. Fewer officers may be needed for a local or regional organization.

Specific duties of each officer should be considered carefully and need to be clarified in the constitution. In general, the President is the chief executive officer, the President-Elect coordinates all workshops and conferences, and the Past President serves as the chairperson of the Nominating Committee.

The Vice-President for Finance handles accounts, the Vice-President for Membership conducts membership drives and maintains updated lists of members, and the Vice-President for Public Relations publicizes the organization and also edits the newsletter. The Recording Secretary keeps accurate minutes of all meetings and maintains a file of all correspondence.

Consideration should be given to the availability of dedicated individuals to serve as officers. The ultimate success of an organization is often dependent on the involvement of many individuals, not just a select few. Having a very small executive board may not provide the continuity necessary for growth.

IDENTIFY COMMITTEES ESSENTIAL for efficient operation. This need should be assessed at the first organizational meeting. Committees should be named, tasks identified with suggested time guidelines for completion, members appointed, and so forth. Significant committees during the early years of the organization include the following:

Membership Committee—to identify potential members, to design, print, and distribute a membership brochure, to maintain a file of members, etc.

Constitution and Bylaws Committee—to write the constitution and bylaws according to appropriate form, to assist in having them approved by the membership, to distribute copies to those concerned, to evaluate each periodically and propose changes, etc.

Financial Committee—to propose policies for transacting business, to design financial forms for reporting to the membership, to determine potential income sources, to seek funding, to secure non-profit, tax-exempt status, etc.

Newsletter Committee—to determine the format, special columns, number of issues, publication dates, method of distribution, means of funding, etc.

Workshop Committee—to propose guidelines for workshops and conferences, determine the number held each year, the sites, registration fees, coordinators, workshop presenters, program formats and themes, etc.

Resource Services Committee—to consider various types of resources that can be made available to the membership, to identify curriculum and audio-visual materials appropriate to the needs of the membership.

Goals Committee—to formulate the immediate and long-term goals of the organization, to evaluate periodically, to help implement ways of achieving them

Nominating Committee—to identify the most qualified persons to run for office, to gather data on the candidates, and to conduct the election.

Obviously a strong local or regional outdoor education organization would not require all of the committees listed above. Committees should be appointed only if their concerns address immediate and long-range goals of the group.

WRITE THE CONSTITUTION AND BYLAWS for the organization. This is necessary in order to apply for non-profit status, but regulations should be kept as simple as possible. Failure to write a specific constitution and bylaws can cause problems later, and soliciting experienced advice is highly recommended. The constitution and bylaws should include the names, purpose, logo, membership, dues, meeting schedules, makeup of the executive board, officers, committees, and their lengths of terms and responsibilities.

What agencies and organizations can assist?

Contact should be made with the many allied professional organizations that share common purposes with the outdoor education organization. Addresses may be obtained from local libraries or other sources. Such allied organizations may include

American Camping Association
Mr. Armand Ball, Executive Director
Bradford Woods
5000 State Road 67 North
Martinsville, Indiana 46151-7902
PHONE (317) 342-8456

Association for Experiential Education
Mr. Mitch Sakofs, Executive Secretary
Box 249-CU
Boulder, Colorado 80309
PHONE (303) 492-1547

Conservation Education Association
Mr. Robert Ellington, President
Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources
Box 7921
Madison, Wisconsin 53707
PHONE (608) 266-1005

Council on Outdoor Education of the American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance (AAHPERD)
1900 Association Drive
Reston, Virginia 22091
PHONE (703) 476-3400

Missouri Coalition for Education in the Outdoors
Tom Cradick, President
6526 Clayton Avenue
St. Louis, Missouri 63139
PHONE (314) 644-2457

National Association for Environmental Education
PO Box 400
Troy, Ohio 45373
PHONE (513) 698-6493

National Association for Recreation and Parks
John H. Davis, Executive Director
3101 Park Center Drive, 12th Floor
Alexandria, Virginia 22302
PHONE (703) 820-4940

National Science Teachers Association
1742 Connecticut Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20009
PHONE (202) 328-5800

New York State Outdoor Education Association
196 Morton Avenue
Albany, New York 12202
PHONE (518) 472-9028

Texas Outdoor Education Association
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Government agencies whose goals are compatible should also be contacted. Several of these agencies are designated differently in different states:

Department of Conservation
Department of Natural Resources
State Department of Education
State Parks and Wildlife Department
National Park Service
United States Forest Service

The Conservation Directory of the National Wildlife Federation (1412 Sixteenth Street, NW, Washington, DC 20036) lists government agencies and citizens' groups for each state. This information will be very helpful to those establishing outdoor education organizations.

Outdoor educators might also consider nature centers and museums and the support and interest of specialty clubs such as

Bass Fishing Clubs
Ducks Unlimited
Safari Club International
Sportsmen's Clubs

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